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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000681

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV

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TAGS: [PREL](#), [ETRD](#), [BM](#), [BG](#)

SUBJECT: NEW BANGLADESH COMMERCIAL OFFICE: MUCH A-BUZZ  
ABOUT NOTHING?

Classified By: DCM Ronald K. McMullen for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (SBU) Pol/Econ Officers paid a courtesy call on newly arrived Bangladesh Commercial Counselor Mohammed Aftabuzzaman on May 13, 2004. Aftabuzzaman has been charged with opening a commercial office and increasing bilateral trade between Burma and Bangladesh, which he characterized as currently insignificant. Existing trade is focused on pharmaceuticals and agricultural products, although Aftabuzzaman had no Bangladesh statistics on trade volume, claiming that the numbers were in Dhaka but had not been sent to him. As a result, Aftabuzzaman had spent his first several weeks in-country trying to collect statistical information, observing that the GOB seemed reluctant to share any customs and trade data, and that his meetings with various ministries/departments had not resulted in needed information. Aftabuzzaman seemed perplexed by what he described as the GOB,s "reserve" about sharing basic information.

2. (SBU) When questioned about near-term plans, Aftabuzzaman suggested that the first meeting of a joint trade commission might be held, but that a date and venue had not been determined; a visit by the new Bangladesh Commerce Minister also was a possibility. Aftabuzzaman indicated that a trade fair that had been scheduled for March was canceled due to lack of interest on the part of Bangladeshi businessmen, but had little else to offer on this topic. Aftabuzzaman said a future trade fair was possible, although nothing was being planned currently. Aftabuzzaman found it difficult to identify current obstacles to more vigorous bilateral trade between Bangladesh and Burma, again commenting on his difficulty in getting customs and other data from his own and the Burmese government.

3. (C) Comment: This is Aftabuzzaman,s, a career Ministry of Finance auditor, first overseas assignment. He seems to have been set adrift by his own government, arriving here with little in the way of marching orders and background, and is now confronting yet another impasse as he seeks to engage with host-country officials to collect trade data. End comment.  
Martinez